



THE NAVAJO NATION

RUSSELL BEGAYE PRESIDENT
JONATHAN NEZ VICE PRESIDENT

Press Release
November 9, 2018

Contacts

Lillie Lane 928-871-7692

Cortasha Upshaw 928-871-6982

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency (NNEPA) and Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources (NNDNR) to address cleanup of abandoned uranium mines

NNEPA, on behalf of the Navajo Nation the Superfund Program, and NNDNR, on behalf of the Navajo Nation Abandoned Mine Lands Reclamation Department (NAMLRL), have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to address cleanup of abandoned uranium mines (AUMs) on the Navajo Nation. There are approximately 523 abandoned uranium mines (AUMs) throughout the Navajo Nation, and although progress is being made in addressing cleanup at the mines, it has become apparent that more and more resources are needed.

NNEPA and NNDNR have recognized the vast extent of the Nation's uranium legacy and have entered into the MOU to pool their resources and expertise. Consistent with its role within the Navajo Nation government, the Superfund Program will continue to serve as the Nation's oversight authority for the mine cleanup, which also is overseen by the United States Environmental Protection Agency, Region 9 (USEPA). NAMLRL staff, who have on-the-ground experience with AUMs due to the reclamation they completed at many of the mines under the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 (SMCRA), will work in coordination with NNEPA and USEPA.

Cleanup at the AUMs takes place pursuant to the federal Comprehensive Environmental Response and Compensation Act (CERCLA). The process embedded in the law requires that there be site investigations and a weighing of alternative solutions for cleanup, with community outreach and involvement taking place throughout the process. CERCLA addresses the radiological hazards from the AUMs and the risk they cause to the public and the environment, whereas SMCRA simply addresses physical hazards, such as open adits and surface expression of the mines.

The cleanup of uranium will require tremendous resources and it will take many years to address all the abandoned uranium mines on the Navajo Nation. This is the beginning of a partnership that will last for years.